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Chairman: Mr. Priputen (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Slovakia)

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In the absence of Mr. Belinga-Eboutou (Cameroon), Mr. Priputen (Slovakia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 110: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/58/3, 16, 38, 161, 167 and Add.1, 168, 169, 341, 374 and 417)

Agenda item 111: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" (*continued*) (A/58/3 and 166)

1. **Ms. Olamendi** (Mexico), after associating her delegation with the statement made by the representative of Peru on behalf of the Rio Group, said that Mexican women had been engaged in a constant struggle for recognition of all their rights since achieving the right to vote 50 years earlier. Certainly, progress had been made: their rights to equality and protection from discrimination were enshrined in Mexican legislation, and the Electoral Act required that at least 30 per cent of candidates for election to Congress should be women; government institutions dealing with women's affairs had been set up at the State and federal levels; affirmative action had given girls equal access to primary education and was about to be extended to secondary education; women were increasingly attending university, where they were in a majority on some university courses; and national statistics were disaggregated by sex, so that government policies in areas such as health, education and employment could be tailored to address the problems specific to women. However, women's earnings were still on average 20 per cent less than men's, looking after the home and children was still exclusively women's work and only a tiny percentage of town councils were led by women. In other words, the myths, prejudices and customs of Mexican society still needed to be changed.

2. One issue of particular concern to her Government was the spate of murders of women in Ciudad Juárez, a town on the border with the United States that was home to one of the biggest drugs cartels in the Western Hemisphere. In order to bring the perpetrators to justice and prevent further murders, the authorities had introduced safer means of transport, increased police numbers and set up a special prosecutor's office and a joint State and federal investigations unit. They were cooperating with civil-society organizations and with the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation, particularly in the training of police officers and investigators, as well as with all the relevant international bodies, including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and with various rapporteurs and representatives of international organizations. In September 2003, the authorities investigating the murders had benefited greatly from the work of a group of United Nations experts who had visited the country at the request of the Government.

3. Her Government cooperated fully on all women's issues with the mechanisms of both the United Nations and the Organization of American States, and was sponsoring a proposal to set up a monitoring mechanism to ensure that States parties complied with the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women. It was also bringing Mexico's legislation into line with the international instruments dealing with women's rights. With regard to the future of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), she was confident that if the recommendations of the Working Group on the Future Operation of INSTRAW were followed, the Institute would be able to play an important role in finding new ways to ensure that the rights of all women were recognized and observed.

4. **Mr. Taranda** (Belarus) said that Belarus' strategy for the advancement of women was based on the Beijing Platform for Action. New institutional and legislative mechanisms were now in place to facilitate implementation of the country's five-year plan of action for gender equality, and domestic legislation was being brought in line with relevant international standards. In recent years, research on gender issues in Belarus had also been stepped up, and the Belarusian media now devoted increased attention to women's issues. Much of the above had been thanks to close cooperation with the United Nations country office, and support from the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

5. The gender mainstreaming efforts under way within the United Nations were particularly welcome, as was the role played by the Commission on the Status

of Women in devising strategies for resolving women's issues. He regretted, however, that agreed conclusions on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women had not been adopted at the Commission's forty-seventh session. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, for its part, had made considerable efforts to reduce the backlog of reports awaiting its consideration and to improve the reporting process. Trafficking in women and girls was one of the worst forms of violence against women, as well as a modern form of slavery. His Government had thus launched a five-year programme to combat the phenomenon, and a technical assistance project had been developed with the support of the International Organization for Migration in order to improve national capacity in that regard.

6. **Mr. Radhakrishnan** (India), after associating his delegation with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the documents before the Committee showed that gender mainstreaming was accorded high priority within the United Nations, but that was clearly not enough: the empowerment of women required affirmative action by all concerned. The review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly at the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women would therefore be particularly significant. Furthermore, a review by the General Assembly would demonstrate that the elimination of discrimination against women and the empowerment of women remained firmly on the global agenda for action.

7. While primary responsibility for the advancement of women lay with Governments, international cooperation was vital: without it, developing countries would not be able to respond to the serious challenges facing them in that area. Such cooperation should include the provision of additional financial resources, the transfer of technology on preferential terms, technical cooperation and capacity-building. He called on the developed countries to fulfil their international commitments to attaining the goals of poverty eradication and sustainable development, observing that the attainment of those goals would help developing countries in their efforts to achieve greater participation by women in the socio-economic and political spheres, as well as equal access for women and girls to education and improved health care.

8. Given the greater focus in recent years on the situation of rural women, the task facing the Third Committee was to give an operational content to the response of the international community to the challenge of ensuring that growth was equitable and supportive of equality between men and women. In India, the socio-economic transformation of villages in rural areas, where 70 per cent of the population lived, would play a crucial role in the overall development of the country and in improving the situation of women. The Government had therefore launched an ambitious programme to provide urban amenities in clusters of villages, which would include the active participation of leaders at the grass-roots level. He pointed out that women had played an important part in the success of the *Panchayati Raj*, or system of self-government at the village level, and one third of the seats on the local bodies known as *panchayats* were reserved for women. The key to empowerment lay in affirmative action in the areas of political participation, economic rights and legal empowerment, all areas in which his Government had made noticeable progress.

9. He welcomed the steps taken by Governments to eliminate harmful traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls, as described in the Secretary-General's report (A/58/169), particularly in the light of the commitments undertaken by Member States in that respect at the international level. With regard to the advancement of women within the United Nations system, he called on the Secretary-General to adopt a proactive approach to achieving gender parity at all levels of the Organization, since the overall participation of women had not increased significantly: it was time for concrete action, rather than further ritualistic exercises in analysing the probable reasons for the slow progress.

10. **Ms. Thandar** (Myanmar), after associating her delegation with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that there were still places in the world where women did not enjoy one of the basic necessities of life — peace and security. She hoped that the current session of the General Assembly would produce concrete results that would improve matters for women in Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq.

11. In Myanmar, the National Committee for Women's Affairs was building on the rights traditionally enjoyed by women in that country, working closely with non-governmental organizations

and local communities to improve the lives of women. Noting that one of the Millennium Development Goals was to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education, she said that the education of women had always been encouraged in Myanmar, whether or not they chose to enter the workforce. Women had traditionally run family businesses from home, but as traditional patterns changed they were increasingly joining the workforce in both the public and private sectors.

12. Teaching was a very popular career choice for women: in schools, about three quarters of the teachers, and half of the principals, were women; and in universities a large majority of the teaching staff in the education and medical faculties were women — over half of the medical doctors and specialists in Myanmar were female — although they were less well represented in subjects such as forestry. A private-sector organization called the Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association played an active part in the advancement of women, offering advice and microcredit to women wishing to start a business or expand an existing one, and had hosted the Tenth Global Conference of Women Entrepreneurs in September 2003, in recognition of the increasingly important role played by women in economic life.

13. Her Government was committed to combating trafficking in persons, which posed a serious threat to women everywhere, including in Myanmar, which shared land borders with five other countries. To that end, it had adopted an action plan based on prevention, prosecution, protection and repatriation. In addition, a handbook had been published and a national seminar held on the issue. The Myanmar Penal Code already provided for heavy sentences for traffickers, but the Government was in the process of enacting a separate anti-trafficking law to further strengthen its legislation in that area.

14. **Ms. Al-Haj-Ali** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the role of women in promoting social progress ranked equally with that of men and the Syrian Government had therefore worked to promote the advancement of women on the basis of equality with men in terms of rights, duties and opportunity. As part of the follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action, a national strategy for Syrian women until the year 2005 had been devised, under which Syrian women participated fully in the political, economic and social life of the country.

15. Her country believed that education was a key to ensuring development and progress and was an essential factor in the empowerment of women, making them aware of their role in society and enabling them to confront the challenges of poverty and ignorance. On that basis, a forum on Arab women and education had met in the first quarter of 2003 under the patronage of the First Lady and had focused on the vital importance of education and the empowerment of women to enable them to play their role in the development process. Among other recommendations, the forum had appealed to ministries of education in the Arab States to raise the rate of enrolment of women and girls in formal education, to provide girls with forms of non-formal education and facilitate their access to them, and to address the problems of rural, illiterate and handicapped women through vocational, education and social services so as to enable them to play an effective role in development. Special committees in all Arab countries would be following up the implementation of those recommendations.

16. The principal recent development in the efforts of the Government to strengthen the role of women and ensure their rights had been the accession of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Referring to the report of the Secretary-General on traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls (A/58/169), she said that Syrian legislation imposed severe penalties on the perpetrators of any crimes or practices affecting the health or rights of women.

17. Her delegation had hoped that substantial progress would have been made by the international community in the full implementation, without double standards, of the Beijing Programme of Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. Those hopes, unfortunately, had not been realized. Women's rights should apply to all women without exception; talk of the equality, freedoms and empowerment of women, and the assertion of their rights, was in vain unless all countries addressed the situation of women under foreign occupation, which was a violation of the basic rights of both men and women and was incompatible with international law, including the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. Women living under Israeli occupation in the Palestinian territories, in Lebanon and in the Syrian Golan were still denied their basic

rights to health care, education and employment and other human rights and suffered gross discrimination, which was an essential aspect of the occupation and of the application by the Israel Defense Forces of a policy of repression, settlement and economic blockade.

18. Women's organizations in the Syrian Arab Republic, in cooperation with the appropriate international organizations, would continue to monitor the situation of Syrian women in the occupied Syrian Golan with a view to ensuring their rights, first among which was the right to the ending of the occupation and the attainment of peace. To the extent that those rights had not so far been attained, all talk of the need for the advancement and empowerment of women was lacking in substance.

19. **Ms. Shahani** (Philippines) said that it was important to ensure that the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields took full account of gender perspectives and concerns. In the process leading up to the review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, in 2005, the United Nations should, as suggested by the Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, consider setting up an economic and social security council where critical economic and social issues could be discussed in a more holistic and democratic context. Gender issues should certainly be part of the debate in such a forum, where rich and poor Member States would be able to find democratic and acceptable solutions to the problems facing them in a globalized knowledge society.

20. Although the vocabulary of gender mainstreaming was familiar to Governments and some progress had been made in that area, further efforts were needed in order to ensure that gender equality was achieved in important sectors such as political leadership, education and health and that affirmative action was taken where it was justified by blatant discrimination against women or special needs, such as those of migrant women. In that connection, she paid tribute to the Executive Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) for its continued work in strengthening women's economic security, supporting women's leadership in governance and peace-building, and promoting women's rights. Among the measures taken by her Government to ensure gender mainstreaming, she highlighted the allocation of 5 per cent of each government department's budget to the advancement of women, the promotion of increased participation by women in local government and its support for the participation of women in economic activities through microfinancing. The Division for the Advancement of Women should promote the provision of regular budgetary support and the use of microfinancing, which was a very useful means of empowering women in both rural and urban households.

21. She was concerned to read in the Secretary-General's report on improving the situation of women in rural areas (A/58/167) that the majority of the world's poor were women. Rural women must be given priority in poverty-alleviation programmes, even though success stories from around the world suggested that it was women themselves who managed to lift themselves out of poverty. Violence against women was another serious problem, and one which underscored the importance of eliminating harmful traditional or customary practices and changing belief systems that sanctioned or reinforced the devaluation of women. Her Government, in close cooperation with the private sector and non-governmental organizations, had adopted programmes to prevent violence against women and had improved the implementation of legislative and judicial measures and strengthened institutional mechanisms addressing the problem.

22. With regard to trafficking in women, the Philippines had ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children and had, in addition, recently increased the penalties under domestic laws for traffickers in persons. Combating trafficking in women was closely linked to the protection of women migrant workers, and her Government was in favour of convening an international conference on migration to address, among other things, the continuing problem of violence against women migrants. In the meantime, it had set up a halfway house called the "Shelter at the Port" to provide immediate protection and reintegration services for migrant women and children who were victims of trafficking. A government information system also allowed more efficient sharing of information on trafficking in persons and a quicker response to the problem.

23. Given that women's access to media and information technologies was so important for their

advancement and empowerment, it was to be hoped that gender concerns would be addressed at the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society due to be held in Geneva in December 2003. Indeed, in troubled and unsettling times, when the old solutions to problems no longer worked, it was surely time to allow the women of the world, in partnership with men, to provide the untapped energy, inspiration and moral direction needed to tackle the many outstanding problems.

24. **Ms. Davtyan** (Armenia) said that the promotion of gender equality had been recognized in the Millennium Declaration as a prerequisite for sustainable economic and social development, but the advancement of women had yet to become a reality in many parts of the world. The situation of women in Armenia would be familiar to anyone acquainted with countries that had undergone fundamental political, economic and social changes, and it had been aggravated by a devastating earthquake, a blockade and the inflow of refugees. As part of its response to that situation, her Government had established an inter-agency commission on gender issues and appointed a deputy minister with specific responsibility for coordinating gender-related activities.

25. One of the major concerns expressed by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women when it considered Armenia's second periodic report had been the underrepresentation of women in political and decision-making bodies. She was pleased to report that there had been a slight increase in the number of women in parliament and in the Government following the elections in May 2003, and she hoped that it would be possible to build on that progress. Women were still underrepresented in the peace process and post-conflict reconstruction, but a university course on gender, conflict resolution and conflict-building had been set up, with the help of UNIFEM, and political parties were promoting women's role in the peace process. On the economic front, special consideration was being given to women in the Government's poverty-reduction strategy and in its efforts to promote entrepreneurship, given the well-known link between economic independence and the empowerment of women.

26. In response to the upsurge in trafficking in persons, to which women and girls were particularly vulnerable, the Government had adopted a comprehensive action plan and had established a Migrants Service Point to provide information on the legal requirements for working in foreign countries and job opportunities in them. Armenia had also ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its two protocols.

27. **Mr. Mackay** (New Zealand), speaking on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum, said that, although it comprised 14 countries with a vast diversity of cultures, geography and circumstances, the Forum was united in its commitment to promote and protect women's rights and to improving the lives of all persons so that they could participate in and benefit fully from development. Not only was gender equality a goal in itself, but the full and active participation of women was critical to sustainable development. In Australia and New Zealand, women were fully represented in the economy, and in many Pacific island communities women provided the main labour force for subsistence production and sale.

28. Despite the increasing trend towards women's assumption of leadership in development, they continued to strive to be part of the decision-making process that governed their lives. Guided by the 1994 Suva Declaration on Sustainable Human Development and the Pacific Platform for Action for Women, the secretariats of the two major Pacific bodies had gender advisers and programmes, and all member countries had personnel and resources for addressing gender issues. Australia and New Zealand had integrated gender issues into regional development programmes. He urged Member States to do the same as a matter of priority and, in that connection, thanked UNIFEM for its constant support for gender and development programmes.

29. He called on all Member States to support the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; nine Pacific Forum countries were States parties, and others were working towards its full ratification and implementation, despite the challenge of inadequate resources. The reporting process could be a positive force for change in the lives of everyone in developed and developing countries alike, and four Forum countries had reported to the relevant treaty body, while a further four were preparing their initial reports. Assistance to that end included high-level support in the form of specific initiatives, such as regional workshops on the preparation and submission of

reports, one of which had recently been hosted by Samoa with help from the international community.

30. The work of the United Nations Development Fund for Women had revealed women's important role in promoting peace through efforts ranging from global disarmament to peace-building at the grass-roots level in various parts of the region. Indeed, the 2000 coup in Fiji had given rise to the Women's Action for Democracy and Peace Movement, Solomon Islands women had played a significant role in brokering peace in their country, and the Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency had been awarded the Millennium Peace Prize for Women for their pivotal peacemaking role in the early stages of the Bougainville peace process in Papua New Guinea. The challenge remained to maximize the untapped potential of women's use of social structures and traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms respected by combatants and their leaders.

31. His delegation shared the concerns expressed in the groundbreaking report on women, peace and security and wished to see the recommendations implemented and the early recruitment of a gender adviser in the Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. He applauded the recent choice by UNIFEM of the Solomon Islands as a pilot country for work on a gender-conflict situation analysis and the development of early-warning indicators, and the launch of the Department of Disarmament Affairs' gender action plan, which other departments could emulate.

32. The rate of new HIV/AIDS infections in the Pacific islands had increased apace since first discovered in the late 1980s, with the probability of a greater explosion. HIV/AIDS was a developmental issue that could devastate the region's economies, societies and security. The extreme poverty, gender inequality, violence against women and children, unequal distribution of resources and development that drove the pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa also prevailed in the Pacific region, in addition to conflict in the Melanesian subregion. The topic had been promptly addressed by Forum health and economic ministers, and latterly by Forum leaders, who had pinpointed strong government leadership as the most effective response to the pandemic, and commissioned a regional strategy for combating it for their next meeting in 2004.

33. Despite the norms clearly spelled out in the Vienna Declaration and Programme for Action, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, violence against women was widespread and required more intensive regional and international action. In that context, the Forum secretariat had hosted a Pacific workshop on strengthening partnerships to eliminate that scourge, and women's crisis centres played a pivotal role regarding problems addressed by Governments. An important aspect of the activities was increased data collection, with UNFPA and WHO assistance. The Forum supported the idea of an omnibus resolution on violence against women, and hoped it would find consensus.

34. **Mr. Schurti** (Liechtenstein) said his country assigned great importance to the advancement of women, the full realization of their rights, and the elimination of discrimination, especially all forms of violence against them. The Office for the Promotion of Equal Rights for Men and Women reported directly to the Prime Minister, who also served as Minister for Family Affairs. The Government annually adopted an action plan for equal opportunities for women and men, whose implementation was subject to review, followed by a progress report, thus highlighting the need for continual readjustments of programmes and the measures towards the ultimate goal of full realization of equal rights and equal opportunities in all aspects of life at all social levels.

35. The 2003 action plan focused on three key areas, the first being violence against women. A joint project with neighbouring countries addressed domestic violence against women. An empirical survey — ensuing from the Government's recognition of the need for investigation to establish a clear picture before embarking on action — measured awareness of the issue in the area. The results would be presented at an interregional forum in December for professionals working on violence against women, which should heighten awareness of the various forms of such violence in the region. A shelter for women victims of domestic violence, to which the Government contributed financially, had been opened in 1991. However, the need for such shelters had been reduced as a result of new legislative and judicial measures that kept the perpetrators at bay, rather than further victimizing women by forcing them to seek shelter outside the home.

36. The action plan's second area of focus was reconciliation of family responsibilities with work. Conferences and workshops brought employers and employees together to find practical solutions, and a working group of the Office for the Promotion of Equal Rights focusing on men's role in the family, which had held a seminar for private-sector human-resource directors for the same purpose, had concluded that men needed to adjust their roles in order to help women balance their work and family life. Moreover, the Law on Salaries of Members of the Administration had been amended to make re-entry into the workplace easier for men and women, and years spent at home with children would count towards initial salary assessment. The Government also provided day-care centres for the children of employees and encouraged private companies to adopt similar policies.

37. Regarding the third area of focus, the participation of women in politics and decision-making, measures were in place to ensure proportional representation of men and women on political committees. Following an analysis of voting patterns, a checklist for political parties had been prepared in order to facilitate the recruitment and promotion of female candidates, and courses had been developed to prepare women for candidature. A Government-funded publicity campaign had encouraged the electorate to vote for women in the latest national elections.

38. Since norms and standards had been in place in Liechtenstein for years, the time had come for implementation and creative and practical measures to eradicate, once and for all, discrimination against women and ensure their advancement. The same held true at the international level. While pursuing a rights-based approach, efforts must not be limited to protecting women from victimization, but must encourage them to contribute through their ability and experience.

39. **Mr. Tesefu** (Ethiopia) said that, since gender equality was an essential element of sustainable development, the implementation of the outcomes of the Beijing Conference and the twenty-third special session occupied an important place in Ethiopia's development agenda, and its fifth periodic report had recently been submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

40. The many legislative and administrative measures taken towards the elimination of discrimination against women included the repeal of provisions discriminating against women in the Family Law and the Penal Code. The minimum marriage age for girls had been raised from 15 to 18, as it was for boys, and there was now joint spousal responsibility for the administration of matrimonial property unless one party had that responsibility by agreement, and spouses were now equal heads of family, rather than the husband alone. Although the prevalence of female genital mutilation, which infringed women's human rights, had decreased from 92 per cent to 80 per cent in the past decade, measures taken to further alleviate the problem included the prosecution of perpetrators, and the consequent revision of the Penal Code. Considerable efforts had been made to reduce gender disparity in education through general and girl-oriented programmes, with the use of affirmative action in favour of girls' enrolment at all educational levels in order to bridge the gap, and dropout rates had fallen somewhat.

41. Although in his country — one with a predominantly agricultural economy — women contributed the lion's share of production, their continued precarious situation was being addressed through the review of the agricultural training curriculum to include a gender perspective, with women farmers receiving training in leadership, management skill and confidence-building, and with regard to gender issues and agriculture, HIV/AIDS and reproductive health. A gender perspective had also been integrated into the Sustainable Development and Poverty-Reduction Plan, essential for assistance to rural women, the prime victims of poverty, and poor women were the main targets of urban and rural micro-credit facilities. Meanwhile, women's participation in decision-making had shown a gradual but encouraging improvement, women's representation in Parliament having increased by 5 per cent over the previous year.

42. The endeavours of non-governmental organizations and development partners notwithstanding, women still faced the challenges of HIV/AIDS, extreme poverty, and lack of access to education and health services, all of which could be overcome only with international support for national efforts at resource mobilization, capacity-building and technology transfer. While the reports before the Committee stressed the weight given to gender equality

at United Nations summits and conferences, follow-up and implementation of their conclusions was even more important.

43. **Ms. Enkhtsetseg** (Mongolia) said that, while her delegation supported the consistent efforts of recent years to promote gender mainstreaming and endorsed the call for their sustained enhancement, such endeavours should be complemented with similar national efforts. Although, with the implementation of Mongolia's National Programme for the Advancement of Women for 1996-2002, much progress had been made towards national consensus-building, protection of women's rights, and improved reproductive health and access to education, unemployment and poverty rates had not dropped significantly and living standards continued to deteriorate. There was an urgent need to revisit the basic concept of the country's development with a clear focus on human-centred development, promoting security, good governance and gender equality, shifting from woman-specific issues to a broader framework of gender equality.

44. The Government's 2002 National Programme on Gender Equality had been developed with the assistance of the relevant United Nations organizations and through broad national consultation of the major stakeholders. It aimed at removing barriers to equal participation of men and women for attaining economic and social development goals, and promoting the family as the basic unit of society, and more clearly prioritized critical areas of concern with time-bound goals and precise monitoring and evaluation indicators. It focused on gender equality in family welfare and development, in economic relations, in rural development and in decision-making, and on the strengthening of a national mechanism with increased participation of civil society. Issues relating to gender equality and the role of women's participation in deepening democracy had been considered at the recent Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, hosted by Mongolia, which had given fresh impetus to the promotion of international and regional cooperation and to national efforts to mainstream gender perspective and strengthen the role of women, and had resulted in the Ulaanbaatar Declaration.

45. Rural women, who played a critical role in enhancing agricultural and rural development, improving food security and eradicating rural poverty, both benefited and suffered from the effects of globalization, hence the need for rural development to form an integral part of national and international development policies and to enhance the role of rural women at all levels. Given the handicaps still besetting rural women, it was essential that follow-up action to the major summits and conferences and the review of their objectives should focus explicitly on rural women and strategies for their improvement. Her delegation would be submitting a draft resolution on the topic. Mongolia attached great importance to the work of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) hoped that a director would soon be appointed, and welcomed the decision to create a 10-member Executive Board for the Institute.

46. **Mr. Bennouna** (Morocco) said that, in the area of the advancement and empowerment of women, two major events had taken place in Morocco in the past year. The first was the completion of the reform of the Personal Status Code, or Family Code, which, while respecting the precepts of Islam and fundamental human rights, granted equal rights and duties to both spouses and upheld and strengthened the family, the foundation of Moroccan society. The new Code, inter alia, abolished the rule of obedience, made the minimum age of marriage the same for women and men, gave women equal rights to file for divorce, and, while not outlawing polygamy, imposed restrictions on the practice that made it almost impossible. In order to implement those reforms, special family courts would be established and training provided to their staff.

47. Another milestone in that area had been the consideration of the second periodic report of Morocco at the twenty-ninth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). A fruitful dialogue had taken place with the Committee regarding the impact of the reform of the Family Code and the difficulties encountered in changing attitudes. Equality between men and women was a gradual and evolutionary process that required determination at all levels in order to achieve the desired objective. By removing the legal restrictions that hampered women's empowerment, Morocco had chosen modernization, development and good governance.

48. **Ms. Weistman** (Israel) said that Israel placed gender equality high on its political and social agenda, and had taken a number of steps to eliminate discrimination and replace it with encouragement. The

establishment of the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women within the Prime Minister's Office had marked a turning point in efforts to promote gender equality. Its main task was to place issues related to the status of women on the national agenda, create programmes and policies and promote gender mainstreaming in all areas of society. The advancement of women was no longer seen as a "women's issue"; gender equality required the attention and commitment of society as a whole. For example, every local authority was required to appoint an adviser on the status of women, who would participate in meetings of the local council. Violence against women was a serious problem facing women in almost every country. In recent years, the Government and non-governmental organizations had made tremendous progress in increasing public awareness of the problem, and new legislation protected all women, regardless of their ethnicity or religion.

49. Many women remained mired in poverty, and Israel's efforts in that area closely followed the conclusions and recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action. One avenue for poverty eradication was the establishment of small businesses, and the Government was providing financing, information, workshops, mentoring and networking opportunities for women. Several microloan funds for women had also been established. A project among Bedouin women in the southern part of the country had demonstrated that a comprehensive approach led to success. The project had included a combination of vocational education and management training, together with financial support and counselling, which had resulted in the establishment of new microbusinesses owned by women, job creation and the empowerment of women in a traditional society. Her delegation looked forward to a fruitful dialogue on the common pursuit of gender equality. The creation of a more egalitarian society, committed to social justice and peace, would yield tremendous benefits for all the people of the world.

50. **Mr. Sar Sambath** (Cambodia) said that in Cambodia, the legacy of three decades of war had left tremendous burdens on the people, especially women and children. Because of an imbalance in the gender ratio, Cambodian women were the majority of the labour force, especially in agriculture. Endemic poverty and porous borders were the root causes of violence against women and human trafficking. Those problems transcended national borders, and required a collective effort to address them.

51. Women and girls in Cambodia received full protection under the law. Women's representation in the various levels of Government was increasing. A Ministry of Women's Affairs and Women Veterans had been established and was implementing a five-year medium-term strategy in four main areas: education, reproductive health, economic empowerment and legal protection against trafficking in women and children. Since September 2001, the Government had been conducting a campaign against all forms of violence against women. It had also established the Cambodian Council for Women, with the Queen as its honorary President and the Prime Minister as honorary Vice-President, raising the visibility of women's rights and protection from discrimination. Despite the many constraints that it faced, the Government had made every effort to coordinate with women's organizations and agencies of the United Nations system.

52. **Mr. Stamate** (Romania) said that the Beijing Conference had marked a change in gender mainstreaming in Romania through the efforts of his Government to implement its recommendations. The recent reform process had led to the restructuring of the Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and the Family. An Equal Opportunity Service had been set up to implement gender mainstreaming in social policy, and centres for assistance to victims of domestic violence and for family counselling had been established. Projects to increase women's political participation had also been undertaken, with the support of United Nations agencies with a presence in Romania, including UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA. Economic empowerment of women in rural areas and the production of gender-disaggregated statistics were other priorities.

53. Violence against women and children could not be tolerated, whether it stemmed from tradition, economic disparity or criminal activity. At its recent session, the Parliament had adopted a number of laws in that area and had established a National Agency for Family Protection. The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of the Interior were also cooperating in a number of activities on prevention and control of domestic violence.

54. **Ms. Otiti** (Uganda) said that in Uganda, the National Gender Policy was an integral part of the

National Development Policy, which illustrated the Government's commitment to gender-responsive development. The overall goal of the Gender Policy was to mainstream gender concerns in the development process in order to improve the social, legal, political, economic and cultural conditions of Ugandan women. It had finally been recognized that the involvement of women in all development activities was no longer a matter of ethics, but of good economics. Sector-specific policy reviews at the national and district levels were ongoing. Training programmes for district women leaders helped women and other marginalized groups to identify their priorities at the grass-roots level, in order to break out of isolation, poverty and powerlessness.

55. Primary education enrolment for girls had increased from 47 per cent in 1997 to approximately 50 per cent in 2003. It had been recognized that universal education benefited both girls and boys and ultimately contributed to more equal relationships between women and men. Government affirmative action policies had also increased the number of women in executive and leadership positions.

56. Poverty eradication, economic growth and sustainable development should not be understood as measures to address material needs only. Poverty was a multidimensional problem which also indicated that the value placed on human existence was low. The National Action Plan for Women continued to implement the policies described and to implement the CEDAW Convention. Article one of the Convention had not yet been fully implemented in Uganda, but change was occurring progressively.

57. **Mr. Ghartimagar** (Nepal) said that, since more than 85 per cent of the population of Nepal lived in rural areas, the eradication of rural poverty and progress in the area of agriculture were essential in order to improve the situation of rural women. High priority had been given to rural development in development plans and the current five-year plan integrated a gender perspective into development policies and programmes. Likewise, several laws had been reformed in order to enhance the status of women in society. Rural women faced many challenges, including poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition and inadequate health-care services; in addition, their rights were violated, owing to superstition and tradition. Priorities and strategies for rural development should focus on income-generating activities, education, rural electrification, sanitation and housing, while national institutions at all levels needed to be strengthened. Nepal requested the international community to provide technical assistance to complement national efforts aimed at the advancement of women.

58. The empowerment of women should be the central element of development priorities and the United Nations should focus on coordination mechanisms for mainstreaming gender-responsive actions and processes. Equal access to economic resources, land, credit, education and health-care services would improve the status, health and economic welfare of women. The Government of Nepal had adopted a national plan of action for the 12 areas of concern of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. The national plan gave special emphasis to the participation of women in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and follow-up of development activities. Likewise, women had been allocated seats on local bodies and in both houses of Parliament. Nepal was a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and had recently submitted its periodic report on the implementation of the Convention.

59. **Ms. Mahouve Same** (Cameroon) said that, among the Millennium Development Goals, great importance had been accorded to the promotion of the empowerment of women and to gender equality as a determining factor for sustainable development. That philosophy was shared by the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development and the Plan of Implementation. Her delegation trusted that the World Summit on Information Society would consider the importance of the gender-specific dimension of information and communication technologies in order to counter the negative effects of the information revolution on gender equality.

60. In Cameroon, the President had made the promotion of women's rights a fundamental and priority element of the Government's policies. That was evidenced by the existence of the Ministry for Women's Affairs, whose activities were well adapted to the objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session. Regarding efforts to combat poverty, studies had identified the recurrent causes of female poverty in rural areas. To deal with them, the Government had

decided to encourage and support strong sectors, such as agriculture, trade, livestock, fishing, handicrafts and the informal sector. As for education and training, the Ministry for Women's Affairs had initiated advocacy, information and education activities for community leaders and parents in order to convince them of the need to send girl children to school. That initiative, together with the fact that primary education was free, had been determining factors in increasing the percentage of children in full-time education. In the area of health, measures had been taken to reduce maternal mortality and to conduct information and awareness-raising campaign on HIV/AIDS. Special efforts had been made to increase women's awareness of the need to preserve the environment and with regard to the sustainable management of water and natural resources.

61. Cameroon had ratified the principal international instruments on the rights of women and was in the process of ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The draft family code took into account concerns related to women's rights. Unfortunately, the momentum was being slowed down by numerous obstacles, particularly lack of financial resources, traditional practices that were harmful to women and the low level of education of women. Cameroon could not tackle those challenges alone and trusted that it would receive substantial financial assistance from the international community to enable it to create the necessary conditions for the advancement of Cameroonian women.

62. **Ms. Kusorgbor** (Ghana) said the Government of Ghana accorded great importance to empowering women in order to make them equal partners in the formulation and implementation of development policies. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session had provided goals and guidelines to improve the status of women. However, women's rights continued to be violated, discrimination abounded, and violence against women and the trafficking of women and girls had increased. Therefore, the international community needed to address issues relating to the continued feminization of poverty, deeply-entrenched negative traditions and cultural practices, and attitudes that perpetuated inequality and subordination.

63. The incorporation of gender perspectives in all the outcome documents of recent major conferences, summit and special sessions of the United Nations was an acknowledgement of the need to integrate gender perspectives into all global frameworks for development, if any progress was to be made. Since 1995, the Government had been putting the necessary mechanisms in place to create an enabling environment for the advancement of women in Ghana. The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, established in 2001, had organized nationwide campaigns to raise awareness about the rights of women and the need to respect them. It had also established a special microfinancing fund to help develop enterprises owned by women, with a view to closing the widening economic gap between men and women and to empower women.

64. Women should be involved in the political process in order to ensure justice and fairness in society, and the Government was promoting gender mainstreaming at all levels and in all sectors. It was also criminalizing negative traditional and customary practices that had proved harmful to the health of women, and was determined to end such practices through legislation, advocacy and improving institutional capacity. Poverty and illiteracy had led to an increase in violence against women, and the Government was strengthening the capacity of the relevant national agencies to ensure that any abuse was prosecuted. In sub-Saharan Africa, women and girls were disproportionately infected and affected by HIV/AIDS; for example, young girls, particularly adolescents, were five or six times more vulnerable to infection than boys. Governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations were developing initiatives to counter this problem.

65. **Mr. Musambachime** (Zambia) said that his delegation associated itself with the statements made by the representatives of Malawi on behalf of the Southern African Development Community and of the Kingdom of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The Beijing Platform for Action was the guiding framework for the national gender programmes. Zambia had identified five priority areas for the advancement of women: education, poverty eradication and skills development, health, decision-making and the rights of the girl child and it intended to tackle those areas using legislation, the institutional framework, advocacy, capacity-building and the empowerment of women.

66. The Zambia Women's Parliamentary Caucus had been established to assist women parliamentarians and Parliament was in the process of legislating a quota system to increase the number of women in decision-making positions in order to achieve the target of 30 per cent by 2005. Capacity-building activities were being provided for women aspiring to political positions, as well as training in gender and human rights for judges, the police and local court justices. Also, Zambia was in the process of revising its Constitution and had established a team of gender experts to identify gender concerns for inclusion in the new text.

67. The Government had established special offices to support the development of policies and programmes for the advancement of women. The latter related to capacity-building, advocacy, poverty eradication, empowerment and health, particularly HIV/AIDS. Increases in the cases of rape and domestic violence were a source of concern, and the Government had established a Victim Support Unit in the Police Service. In addition an independent Police Complaints Authority dealt with complaints of police abuse. Over the last five years, Zambia had made progress in addressing important gender issues; however, the progress made would not be sustainable if women's poverty and economic empowerment were not addressed. Zambia therefore appealed to the international community to support its efforts and enable it to create a society in which women and girls had equal opportunities with men and boys, free from discrimination and exploitation.

68. **Mr. Bazel** (Afghanistan) said that, over the last two years, the Afghan Government had taken significant steps towards the full realization of the human rights of women and their participation in the civil, cultural, economic, political and social life of the country. In the context of Afghan society, the establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, headed by a woman, should be considered a major achievement. The Ministry was engaged in streamlining gender issues in different activities and agendas of the Afghan Government, including the participation of women in the political process. Several specialized agencies of the United Nations were supporting the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Of particular interest was the support provided by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) for the establishment of women's centres in eight provinces and working groups on gender and law.

69. The Afghan Government had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in March 2003 and efforts were under way to implement its provisions by enacting new laws and regulations. Moreover, there was a division of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, headed by a woman, that was responsible for women's rights. In his recent address to the General Assembly, the Afghan President had referred to the affirmative action policies adopted by the Government to promote the rights of women. For example, when the Constituent Assembly had been convened, 64 seats had been allocated to women.

70. The right of women and girls to work, receive education and have access to health care without discrimination were some of the fundamental rights that had been restored. Evidently, many challenges and difficulties remained, but Afghanistan was confident that it could overcome them with the assistance of the international community. The main problem was rehabilitation and reconstruction, and the full realization of the human rights of women and girls would only be achieved through the creation of a prosperous and developed Afghan society.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.